



**Read Carla & Cecilia's moving story
and learn how CHSofNJ helped
through their sad most trying times.**



Our Little Red Stocking Story You Helped Make Happen This Past Year

Carla and Cecilia were always very close since they were toddlers. Then, two years ago, Carla lost her little sister, Cecilia, to a sudden illness. Cecilia was only thirteen months younger than Carla, and the two girls had been inseparable since before they could even walk. They shared everything; toys, clothes, hobbies, and even friends. More than sisters, Carla and Cecilia were truly best friends. So, when 13 year old Cecilia became very ill, Carla spent most of her time by her sister's bedside, reading to her, drawing pictures and painting together, and chatting about the newest gossip Carla learned at school that day. This went on for weeks, until that sad day Carla went to Cecilia's room to say good morning. It took only a moment for Carla to realize that Cecilia wasn't just sleeping, but to Carla, she could not accept she had died. She climbed into her sister's bed and held her, crying out for their mother to come help while tears streamed down her cheeks.

Like Carla, her mother and step-father were devastated by Cecilia's passing. Their mother's grief presented as shock, disbelief, sadness, and then anger. However, Carla's stepdad, who was Cecilia's birth father, was unable to cope with losing her. He relied heavily on drinking to get through each day, and developed an addiction that took over his life. Carla wanted to be strong for her mother by focusing all of her energy on holding her family together, but then she never really processed her own grief. Eventually she became overwhelmed by stress and anxiety, and desperate for an escape. She started looking for a new group of friends, because her old friends just reminded her of her little sister. Carla connected with a group of kids who were known for drinking, sneaking out, partying, and skipping class.

Almost one year after Cecilia's passing, Carla's mother and stepfather separated. This final severing of her once happy family took Carla's last bit of stability away and proved to be more than Carla could handle. She had been struggling in school since Cecilia died, but now she stopped attending most classes altogether. And she made more and more dangerous choices; drinking and having unprotected sex. Carla's life had spiraled out of control, but it wasn't until she had a positive pregnancy test that she decided to ask for help. For the first time she opened up to her mother about what was going on in her life and how lost she felt. "Why was she the one who lived? Her sister was the best person", she would tearfully plead.

Carla's mother had been a committed and nurturing parent before Cecilia died, and the shock of her 14 year old Carla's pregnancy made her realize how distant they had become. She was determined to help her daughter get back on track. A school counselor connected Carla and her mother with The Children's Home Society of New Jersey (CHSofNJ) for counseling. Carla spoke with one of CHSofNJ's caring and knowledgeable Birth Parent Counselors, who explained all of her options for being a caring mom and supported her as she worked through her feelings. Carla came to a loving decision that was right for her. Carla decided to place this baby she was about to give life to with one of our adoptive parents who could both love her/him and have the stability and income to give her baby a good life, a good education, and all the chances to be successful. She also connected with our counselor in our FACES program, where she participated in individual and parent-child counseling sessions to process and overcome her losses. Through her work with our expert trauma-informed counselors, Carla gathered up her strength and courage. She found her way back to caring about herself. FACES also helped strengthen Carla's bond with her mother, as they began to talk candidly about their feelings and how they needed each other.

When it came time for Carla to give birth, she no longer was that wild party girl who had gotten drunk at a party and become pregnant by a boy she didn't even know. She was no longer at risk of repeating the ninth grade. She had reconnected with her old friends, and she had found happiness and stability with her very loving mother. She became active in her high school "We Care" club mentoring other younger students.

Because of donors like you, CHSofNJ has been **saving children's lives and building healthy families** since 1894. Our staff was able to support Carla to overcome her trauma and become the happy, caring person she wanted to be. We were able to help Carla find a loving adoptive family to provide a wonderful life for her baby. CHSofNJ was able to make a meaningful difference in the lives of more than 84,000 babies, children, parents, grandparents and caregivers last year alone. These incredible feats are made possible with the help of caring donors like you. Your donation today will allow CHSofNJ to be there for even more babies, teens, children, and families in the coming year. Please partner with us to **save more children's lives and build more healthy families** throughout New Jersey and Eastern Pennsylvania.